

K-POP CRAZE



◀ Long-time K-pop fan junior Arianna McNeese performs some of the dance moves that won her a K-pop competition in Dallas.
PHOTOS BY AMELIA KURK

Korean pop music spreads worldwide, gains American fanbase

Amelia Kurk
Executive Editor

Created originally for an Asian demographic and known for its hyper-polished bands with fresh-faced members, and catchy, repetitive hooks that are begging for “cute” choreography, K-pop or Korean pop has a fandom among some students.

“I first started listening to it a long time ago, randomly on YouTube,” junior Arianna McNeese said. “I thought it was really catchy and cute.”

Music critics describe K-pop as a product of 90s boy bands—generically happy, unattainably attractive and perfectly packaged. Corporate companies dictate moves of K-pop band members, or idols, by choosing their personal style, controlling their public personas and watching closely for waning popularity or scandals.

“Companies put a lot of emphasis on making idols appeal visually to the public,” junior Kaytlyn Batson said. “Idols typically go on really strict diets and exercise regularly in order to maintain a nice body, and they also wear makeup everywhere but in their dorms or practices.”

Pigeonholing K-pop as a passing fad that will fade into music history like NSync or the Backstreet Boys might be the wrong way to view this phenomenon sweeping East Asian nations and on the verge of a major breakthrough in the United States.

“It will continue to expand, because it’s so different and intriguing, combining singing and dancing, which

isn’t often seen in American pop [now],” junior Haley Groff said. “The K-pop storm has already begun, and some top groups have held high spots even on American music charts.”

One of the most important aspects of the genre is the choreography. McNeese fell in love with the upbeat and unusual techniques of K-pop’s dance culture. She has danced hip hop for years with Suzanne’s School of Dance, but has ventured more into the K-pop style lately. She recently competed in a competition in Dallas on a whim.

“I found out about this K-pop contest where you compete against others who are singing in Korean or dancing K-pop,” McNeese said. “I competed and got first place. I was even in the Korean newspaper in Dallas.”

McNeese is inspired by the ways K-pop allows her to pursue her love of dance and her talent for creating new choreography. The K-pop dance style is a mix of signature moves that closely follow a concept that often has little to do with the song’s lyrics.

“A girl group could be part of the ‘summer fun’ concept, so they always wear summer clothes and do dance moves that fit with the theme,” McNeese said. “One guy group’s concept is ‘heartbreakers,’ and they wear leather jackets all the time.”

K-pop band members are recruited by the managing companies and assigned particular roles to play on and off stage, creating an art that blurs the lines between fiction and reality.

“The band concept is important,” junior Meghan Ja-

cinto said. “Member roles include the innocent member, the cute member, the leader, the rapper and other members who are cast to be dorky.”

K-pop band members spend years perfecting their craft, sometimes starting as early as thirteen years old when they audition for and are accepted by companies. They have to master the distinctive sound of the genre, the intricate dance moves and role-playing aspect. Freshman Brooke DiGiacomo, a member of the band, understands how much dedication this takes.

“As a musician, I can appreciate how much work they put into making this quality of music,” DiGiacomo said. “These artists go into companies and train for years, and I can appreciate how much work that takes.”

Another unique opportunity presented by K-pop is that it brings people together with similar interests, giving insight into an intricate culture.

“K-pop actually opens our eyes to see what we are missing of other people’s cultures and to appreciate them,” Groff said. “It’s about gaining cultural appreciation. And that is thanks to K-pop and YouTube that links the countries together.”

Those interested in learning more about K-pop should know that an ability to understand Korean is not required. English translations of song lyrics can be found online, and bands work English hooks into their songs to make them easy to sing along to.

“Check it out,” McNeese said. “There are so many groups that you are bound to find one that clicks.” •

SHINee

Boy group known for highly synchronized dancing

SNSD

Also known as Girls’ Generation. One of the most popular girl groups

2NE1

Four-member girl group with a trademark edgy style

TRENDING K-POP BANDS
check them out: kpopstarz.com